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ABSTRACT

Two focus groups were held (fall 1996 semester) with selected faculty from the University of North Texas (UNT), College of Arts and Sciences to explore faculty perceptions of the Libraries' value to teaching and research and to learn more about what would allow faculty to make greater use of the UNT Libraries. The following major themes emerged from the focus groups: (1) access to electronic resources; (2) access to journals; and (3) libraries' role in assisting students. In addition to these themes, both of the focus groups held in common the perception of expert, helpful, and friendly service from the librarians and library staff. Overall, the focus groups revealed a positive perception of the UNT Libraries' past and current role in supporting teaching and research among the faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences. To encourage a continuation of this and to address the concerns expressed regarding access to electronic resources and access to journals, recommendations include strengthening the current library liaison program to keep the faculty directly informed and continuing efforts to integrate all electronic resources effectively into the campus computer network infrastructure. (AEF)

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Faculty Perceptions of Library Support for Teaching and Research
A Focus Group Study
with Selected Faculty from the College of Arts and Sciences

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March 31, 1997

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Faculty Perceptions of Library Support for Teaching and Research
A Focus Group Study
with Selected Faculty from the College of Arts and Sciences

Executive Summary

During the 1996 fall semester, two focus groups were held with selected faculty from the College of Arts and Sciences to explore faculty perceptions of the Libraries' value to teaching and research and to learn more about what would allow faculty to make greater use of the UNT Libraries.

The following major themes emerged from the focus groups:

1. Access to electronic resources;
2. Access to journals;
3. Libraries' role in assisting students.

In addition to these themes, both of the focus groups held in common the perception of expert, helpful, and friendly service from the librarians and library staff.

Overall, the focus groups revealed a positive perception of the UNT Libraries past and current role in supporting teaching and research among the faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences. To encourage a continuation of this and address the concerns expressed regarding access to electronic resources and access to journals, the following recommendations are offered:

- Strengthen the current library liaison program to keep the faculty directly informed of how to access electronic resources for their disciplines, the status of the journal collection, and the options available to access journals the Libraries do not physically carry. Liaisons serve a vital role due to the personal contact they provide with faculty. While the faculty enjoy the ***UNT Libraries Newsletter***, they indicated that direct personal contact was the most effective means of conveying information to them about the Libraries.

- Continue efforts to integrate <u>all</u> electronic resources effectively into the campus computer network infrastructure. The faculty want access from their offices. The extent to which the Libraries can work successfully with other campus entities to ensure this access will determine how the faculty view and use the Libraries in the future.

Faculty Perceptions of Library Support for Teaching and Research
A Focus Group Study
with Selected Faculty from the College of Arts and Sciences

Background

As part of the UNT Libraries' efforts to provide the best possible service to the UNT community and meet the requirements of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, a survey schedule has been established. For the 1996/1997 academic year, the College of Arts and Sciences is being surveyed by the Libraries. As part of this process, during the 1996 fall semester two focus groups were held with selected faculty from the College of Arts and Sciences to learn more about faculty perceptions of library support for teaching and research, faculty use of library resources and services, and faculty views of future directions for library resources and services to best support teaching and research. Themes identified from these focus groups were then used to design a survey instrument which will be delivered to all the faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences during the 1997 spring semester.

A focus group methodology was initially selected because this methodology provides a richer picture and understanding of issues than more traditional survey methods can provide alone. The goal behind the study was to identify themes for further probing with a survey. The results from both the focus groups and survey will be used by the Libraries' Administration as a baseline for strategic decision making to support teaching and research in the College of Arts and Sciences.

This study was designed by Suzanne Byron. Greg Sidberry and Gay Woods assisted with facilitating the focus groups. Crystal Pinkston provided the tape transcriptions.

Study Design

A focus group interviewing protocol was developed. The protocol was designed to gather information on: 1) faculty perceptions of the Libraries' value to their teaching; 2) faculty perceptions of the Libraries' value to their research; 3) faculty ideas about what would allow them to make greater use of the Libraries. A copy of the focus group questions are provided in Appendix A.

Two focus groups were held during the 1996 fall semester. All faculty from the College of Arts and Sciences were categorized into one of four academic divisions (humanities, natural and physical sciences, professional programs, and social sciences) and further stratified by gender (female and male). Potential participants were then randomly selected from these stratified categories in equal numbers. Each group included eight participants. These groups have been labeled as Group 1 and Group 2.

Each focus group was facilitated by two librarians. All focus groups were audio taped and the tapes were transcribed. The transcriptions were then examined to identify themes for the faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences in relation to the UNT Libraries' support of teaching and research.

Discussion

For the purposes of illustrating the themes that emerged from the focus groups, representative quotes from the transcripts have been provided. Illustrative comments are listed by group name and the transcript comment number. To ensure anonymity of the participants, any wording that might identify a participant has been replaced by [...]. Any clarifying remarks for comments are enclosed in [] at the end of the quote.

The following major themes emerged from the focus groups:

1. Access to electronic resources;
2. Access to journals;
3. Libraries' role in assisting students.

Access to Electronic Resources

Access to electronic resources deals with the ability to use the electronic resources available through the UNT Libraries. Overall, the faculty were very positive and excited about the array of electronic information sources available through the Libraries and felt this greatly enhanced their research support. The faculty were deeply interested in the ability to gain access to these resources from their offices, but expressed concerns and frustrations about platform and infrastructure limitations.

Group 1

6 [...] I'm under the impression that previously Medline was set such that there was a Silver Platter [version] here physically and also down at the Health Sciences Center and there is a need not to have redundant services at least that was the explanation that was offered to me after seeking it out when Medline had changed and I had to access it a different way from my file server and so I guess the event that you want to link with is kind of my frustration in using the Medline down at the Health Sciences Center [...]

[speaker was having difficulty accessing Medline from his office]

9 [...] my most memorable experience was a few years ago going into the library after not having done much work in the library and realizing that everything had been computerized and card catalogs were now becoming extinct and feeling somewhat panicked not knowing how to start researching but I've decided I like the computer much better and its worked out real well.

38 I certainly appreciate and I know graduate students appreciate the increase in different CDROMs you have available on the file server [...]

117 [...] our campus is PC based or oriented or has to be at least and what we're able to do from your office with this degree of how new your computer is and we have one faculty member who has a brand new computer and asked for one of the PCs but its the MAC and he cannot access the most common bibliography in other languages from his office [...]

Group 2

2 [...] just the joys of trying to figure out how to use the computer system from my office instead of having to walk to the library [...]

31 [...] I'm a MAC user and I can't get into anything in the library from my office [...]

144 [...] surprise to have the technology all together. When I went to grad school you know it was very simple you had these mixed terminals [...] if you wanted to get to the science citation index you had to use three terminals in this particular library else you had to wait in order to look it up in the books [...]

[speaker was referring to the ease of accessing multiple resources through one terminal]

Access to Journals

Access to journals had several components. Faculty expressed this as one of the major supports to their research. Primary concerns surrounding this theme included: lack of journal holding to support a faculty member's research area; incomplete journal holdings; and having journals stored at the Library Annex. Use of InterLibrary Loan, the Alliance for Higher Education, and the UnCover Service were mentioned as primary supports to get journal articles the Libraries do not physically carry.

Group 1

3 [...] they have about 5% of all the journals I need so I try to be as self sufficient as possible by subscribing to software and trying to request articles as they appear I think I'll need them and then every time I have to write a paper or grant proposal I have to go down to the UT Southwestern library in Dallas [...]

[speaker was discussing using InterLibrary Loan and an AHE Library to fill in research needs for journals]

32 You know I hesitate to rely on that because I know how much is left for the [...] department. Its about six thousand dollars which means about fifteen articles per faculty member per year so I've use it only once when it was an absolute emergency and I don't encourage my students to use it either. If we tried to use it to meet our needs it would be gone tomorrow and so we just try not to use it if we don't have to.

[speaker was discussing UnCover]

129 [...] last spring utilizing the LEXIS-NEXIS system some of the students wanted to know if it was all right if they used publications in other languages that they could read instead of just English and I said you know of course, why not [...]

[speaker was commenting on the availability of full-text resources available through the LEXIS-NEXIS service that supplement the physical journal holdings of the Libraries]

Group 2

1 [...] I'll look for an article in a journal and its 1982 which is a journal that the library does receive and when I get down there I notice that there's this fourteen year gap and 1982 happens to be in that fourteen year gap. So you know sometimes its frustrating because the journals are there but for some reason they stop and then they start again and so that can be frustrating [...]

63 One of the things that you do that you don't advertise that you do [...] is give library cards to other libraries. In the area I teach, sometimes a course, when it makes, that we really can't keep all the journals that are needed so they need to go to the medical school to read the medical journals and its terribly good to have a library card from us that accredits them for that use and its possible some of your students might use such a card.

[speaker was discussing use of AHE libraries to supplement course needs]

Libraries' Role in Assisting Students

The Libraries' role in assisting students refers to the ways the Libraries support the work of students attending the university. Reference assistance for students working on class assignments was discussed as well as library instruction sessions. One of the main threads concerning this theme was the students lack of information literacy and critical thinking skills for conducting research.

Group 1

90 [...] I do that every time I teach, every spring. That's when I have a research class, then I do [...]

[speaker was discussing having library instruction sessions for classes]

92 I think they've been helpful for students with disabilities, helping read material, find material, being very patient with students who need some extra help. So I think the people working here have been very helpful.

93 We have some reference librarians that are good.

[speakers for comments 92 and 93 were referring to reference service]

Group 2

79 Well I have taken classes to the library for introductions to the library, its resources and so forth in the past.

81 [...] when they devise or think about a research project for which they are going to have to use the library and they think well I'm going to go find some books and cart them away with me and its sometimes virtually impossible to get them beyond that frame of mind and but I think it is also difficult for them because maybe they don't know how to do research [...]

[speaker is describing students lack of information literacy and research skills]

177 [...] I guess you just sort of assume that when people walk in a library they know what to do and often times I don't either and I end up in the reference section, but I think students wouldn't realize it and I'm constantly saying there are librarians paid to work in the library. Go ask them these questions and they, I guess, they're afraid to or something [...]

[speaker is describing students lack of information literacy and research skills]

Summary

In addition to the themes of access to electronic resources, access to journals, and the Libraries' role in assisting students, both of the focus groups held in common the perception of expert, helpful, and friendly service from the librarians and library staff as evidenced from the following excerpts:

Group 1

1 [...] they came over, they talked with me, they called me, they e-mailed me, they did everything possible to get them ordered, they rush ordered them, and the faculty in the course were extremely well pleased with the response they got out of the acquisitions.

[speaker is referring to an interaction with library staff members in Technical Services]

95 The attitude that I think exist on campus in some places, some would say a lot of places, some places that I do not find in the library, is the attitude, "well we can't do that because it hasn't been done that way for the last thirty years." I haven't found that attitude too much in the library. The people seem to be more accessible and more receptive.

[speaker was comparing the service attitude of the Libraries to other areas of the university]

Group 2

5 [...] the people are lovely.

[speaker is referring to librarians and staff in the Science and Technology Library]

12 [...] I've always found the library staff very helpful whether it be looking for help with government documents or InterLibrary Loan matters. I've always found the staff helpful and more than forgiving of my forgetfulness and things like that.

Overall, the focus groups revealed a positive perception of the UNT Libraries past and current role in supporting teaching and research among the faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences. To encourage a continuation of this and address the concerns expressed regarding access to electronic resources and access to journals, the following recommendations are offered:

- Strengthen the current library liaison program to keep the faculty directly informed of how to access electronic resources for their disciplines, the status of the journal collection, and the options available to access journals the Libraries do not physically carry. Liaisons serve a vital role due to the personal contact they provide with faculty. While the faculty enjoy the ***UNT Libraries Newsletter***, they indicated that direct personal contact was the most effective means of conveying information to them about the Libraries.

- Continue efforts to integrate all electronic resources effectively into the campus computer network infrastructure. The faculty want access from their offices. The extent to which the Libraries can work successfully with other campus entities to ensure this access will determine how the faculty view and use the Libraries in the future.

Group 1

12 [...] I have a kind of recurrent negative experience, is that, I have found when I return to my desk and my nice computer there with lovely interfaces and things like that, I have found that I can't do things with the library system that I expect it to do this week. For example, the card catalog has been unavailable to me completely and apparently to everybody else in our building. I don't know if its our network, our people, or what it is.

Appendix A

College of Arts and Sciences
Focus Group Protocol

1. As an icebreaker, please introduce yourself and describe your most memorable experience with the UNT Libraries.

2. What do you perceive to be the most valuable for your students in using the UNT Libraries? The most difficult?

   Probe: do you perceive any differences between ug and gr students

   Probe: have you ever had a librarian work with your classes or students

3. What do you find most valuable or helpful about the UNT Libraries in your teaching and research?

   Probe: which services have you used

4. What would allow you to make greater use of the UNT Libraries?

   Probe: what type of access would be easiest or most convenient for you (home/office/other)